

2002 Annual Report Executive Summary

Empower Lewiston Enterprise Community

The Lewiston (Maine) Enterprise Community is rather small (0.9 square miles, about 4,500 in 2000 census) compared to many of the USDA Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities. However, it has a big Strategic Plan (total budget is currently \$87 million); a large number of interested and helpful partners (50+) and projects (50+); and an obvious need for the program. Poverty rates in the EC were 47% and 34% in the two EC census tracts (1990 census) and then 46% and 37% (2000 census); from 1990 to 2000 the population decreased from about 6,000 to about 4,500. Lewiston began declining in the 1960's from a vibrant community with many manufacturing jobs to one that lost its economic base to southern and foreign competitors. From one mill alone, 5,000 jobs were lost. The city's 1990 census population of about 40,000 stood roughly where it was 100 years ago; it continued to lose population in the 90's and in 2000 was about 36,000. After enormous local efforts, USDA approved the Strategic Plan, and two downtown census tracts were designated as an Enterprise Community in December, 1998. Empower Lewiston (EL), a 501(c)(3) separate from the city, was established to oversee implementation of the Plan and administer federal and other funds for the Plan. Strategic Plan implementation has brought about some significant achievements by our partners and EL.

To date, some of them are: 900 new jobs, 700 retained jobs; 300 clients served with 2,000+ services/referrals and 170 programs in the WERC First project; \$40 million in job/economic development investment activity; \$20 million for other projects; \$500,000 in Empower Lewiston funding distributed/reserved for 18 programs; 50 EL support letters helped bring in millions more for other projects; and 50+ partners/50+ programs.

1. MOST SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS: COMMUNITY CENTER (BMK 6) The physical and ceremonial groundbreakings took place last fall, with completion expected by Oct. 2003. The \$2.6 million facility will provide access for residents to a medical and dental Family Health Center, Head Start/Day Care, adult education, community meeting rooms, and non-profit offices, including Empower Lewiston (EL). The Lewiston Housing Authority oversaw the bidding process for the architectural plans and construction; worked with the various donors and future occupants, and shepherded the project carefully. **HOUSING (BMK 8)** The Sisters of Charity Health System (SOCHS) sold one of its new housing units to a family with income at 30-50% of median, providing a first mortgage of \$40,000 on a unit that appraises at \$80,000 and cost \$127,000 in total project costs. The difference, or buy down, is being picked up by various groups, and is completely gone after year 10. This is the first new home construction in the EC in decades; the project will have 15 units when completed. **LEAD-BASED PAINT PROGRAM (BMK 10)** The City of Lewiston screened 80+ children at EC locations, approved 42 units for lead project grants and/or rehabilitation loans; and set up an informative website at <http://www.ci.lewiston.me.us/lead>. The grant funds blood testing for children in low-income housing, removal of lead-based paint hazards from privately-owned low-income homes and apartments, community education and outreach, job training for lead hazard control workers, and other efforts. This project is particularly important since a major EL goal is to break the cycle of poverty. In the EC, 94% of the units in census tract 201 and 71% in census tract 204 were built prior to 1950; these are especially likely to contain lead paint. Lead paint poisoning, even at levels as low as 10ug/dL, has been shown to cause children to have learning disabilities and behavioral problems; at extremely high levels (70 ug/dL or higher), seizures, coma and even death. **SEEDS OF CHANGE (BMK 31)** In December EL took on direct management and funding of this strategy and hired a full time outreach worker. Tina G. Bailey is a lifelong resident of the EC, is extremely fond of her neighborhood, and will earn her A.A. in the spring of 2003 (after going back earlier to finish her high school education), so she is well qualified to relate to other residents and set a great example. EL expects that this effort will result in much greater interaction

with EC residents. **ZONE ADMINISTRATION (BMK 32)** In December EL hired a half-time administrative assistant. This person will take over work on the benchmark database, USDA weekly report, support letter tracking, general office tasks, and other activities that will give the Executive Director more time for grant seeking, coalition-building, outreach, and other similar efforts. **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (BMK 33)** A number of projects were completed in 2002 that resulted in \$32+ million invested in new or rehabilitated facilities and the creation (42) or retention (700) of jobs. There were: renovation of two floors of the former Knapp Shoe store for an expansion by Central Maine Medical Center (\$10 million, 27 new jobs and 150 retained jobs); construction of a new distribution center for the Sun Journal newspaper (\$5 million, 200 jobs retained); expansion of the LePage Bakery (\$1.5 million, 130 jobs retained); renovation for ME Dept. of Human Services (\$3.8 million, 185 jobs retained); renovation for an expanded District Court (\$9.5 million, 27 jobs retained); and renovation for a nursing school for Central Maine Medical Center (\$2.3 million, 15 new jobs). **COMMUNITY – SOCIAL INTERVENTION/SUPPORT PROGRAMS (BMK 34)** SeniorsPlus completed and distributed copies of the “Community Resource Guide” in early 2002. It contains information on more than 350 local programs for food, housing, employment, and other areas. It helps EC residents locate the help they need, and has been extremely well received by all who use it. The directory was distributed widely. **RESIDENTS** In 2002 there were several new activities to draw resident participation. EL’s Community Participation Cmt. and partners arranged for five “Craft Nights” to take place at the EC’s Multi-Purpose Center in the EC that drew relatively many children and adults. On Nov. 30, EC board and residents assisted with the Haven of Grace household goods giveaway (including giveaway of EL informational flyers) that also drew many residents. Six EC residents, in addition to the six on the board, participated in the rating and funding decisions for EL funding of submitted proposals. EL surveyed the residents at its annual community meeting, using a revised format from last year’s that elicited more useful responses, which were compiled to provide EL with direction on which future projects to support.

2. LEVEL OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: Community participation increased in 2002 as there were many new and ongoing efforts, including the five “Craft Nights” at the EC’s Multi-Purpose Center, the Nov. 30 distribution of household goods to local residents; and the six residents that participated in the grants’ ratings and funding decisions. We again had our annual “Community Discussion” – an opportunity for public elections, to provide information and through remarks and a survey, to obtain input from the community. The residents’ responses on projects they felt were needed for themselves and for the EC community, and their general comments were compiled and given to the EL board for consideration. In 2002 EL worked directly and indirectly with two special populations in the EC. There has been a large immigration by Somalis to Lewiston, starting in 2001; to date, about 1300-1500 have settled in Lewiston. A smaller Hispanic community has been here for several years. EC board and staff met several times with representatives of and partners with these groups to provide helpful information, attempted to have them participate on the EL board, decorated Longley School with a theme of diversity and non-violence, helped fund (and on Jan. 11, 2003 attended) the diversity rally. Most of the Somali community’s time for the year’s last quarter was occupied by a local issue regarding the level of public welcome shown to the new arrivals. Empower Lewiston employs a number of methods to inform the public. The USDA-required report has been formatted to meet the needs of the organization, community and USDA and is distributed to 140 contacts. We also use press releases to local media, including the free bi-weekly community paper (in 2002, at least 25 articles on EL/EC projects and activities); purchased ads in both of the papers to provide notices, information to the local-access cable station and all-news radio station, flyers, presentations and informal discussions with various constituencies.

3. PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCES: Ongoing relationships between benchmarks leads and the organization have improved over the year. A few of the new partners/new projects this year are: Downtown Neighborhood Association received funding from EL in 2001 and engaged with EL board on a number of activities in 2002; the Haven of Grace, RI associates who came for the clothing giveaway (and will return in 2003); four groups received grants (EL provided support letters): Sandcastle

Preschool to expand their hours for EC residents, the Univ. of Southern Maine to expand their entry level nursing program to the local Lewiston/Auburn College, Community Mediation Services to providing mediation training to several bilingual locals (to work with the Somali population), and the Franco-American Heritage Center to restore the building and create performance and museum space. Manic Designs, an EC business, hosted a "Make It/Take It" gift basket project attended by more than 30 Longley school children. For 2002, we have about \$87 million total budget and \$62 million received – about 70% of the needed funding for the 10-year program (although this does not account for inactive or future projects). The funds have a good mix of sources: \$510K of EL/EC funding; \$3.8 million from US HUD; \$510K from US DOT and other federal agencies; \$550K from USDA/Rural Development; \$10 million from state government; \$9 million from local and regional government; \$23 million from the private sector; \$14.5 million from nonprofits; and \$275K from other sources. Every EL/EC dollar leveraged \$121. Most benchmark leads participate in benchmark reviews; they are viewed as essential to that process. At the end of most quarters, EL generates a report from the USDA benchmark system, provides the results to the board and benchmark leads, and requests information about any appropriate changes.

4. PROBLEMS/OBSTACLES: The ongoing problems are securing sufficient and reliable funds, making enough progress and obtaining more community (especially low-income residents) input. There are more ideas than current funding, more projects than available resources, and not enough buy-in by local residents.

5. SOLUTIONS: With the hiring of a half-time administrative assistant for the office, the Executive Director will have more time to write grant applications in 2003. The organization works with its Congressional delegation and EC peers regarding the federal funds. The board has recognized the desirability of updating the strategic plan and setting priorities. The hiring of a fulltime outreach worker will greatly increase outreach efforts.

6. BEST PRACTICES: We hired a fulltime resident to do outreach to residents. Tina Bailey is a lifelong resident of the EC and has herself worked diligently to improve the quality of her life. She understands how difficult it sometimes is to take the first step. Her understanding and openness give her a level of credibility with the residents that will be a major asset in helping EC residents help themselves. To make board meetings more welcoming to residents, we changed the set up of the board meetings. Previously the tables were in a U-shape so non-board attendees sat in an "audience" section; they are now in a rectangle, with any attendees sincerely welcomed to sit at the table. Before there were no extra handouts, so non-board attendees received none; now extra copies of handouts are brought to the meetings.

7. PLANS/PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE: We will locate funding from non-governmental sources and update the Strategic Plan and develop priorities. We will continue/expand our contacts with other EZ/EC communities and our publicity and outreach efforts. We will again undertake efforts on specific projects such as the Furniture Bank, workshops on topics of high interest to residents (education, employment, housing, etc.), work on establishing a neighborhood center, change the way we distribute our funding, and possibly host a conference. There will be some training for the board on a number of matters such as USDA help in providing training on "board 101" and on marketing, benchmarks, and tax credits.